

VERBAL ESCALATION CONTINUUM

The stages of verbal escalation are listed below. It is important to remember that an individual who is losing control may not follow a sequential pattern of escalation. For example, some stages may be skipped altogether, or the person may bounce back and forth between two or more stages. An important deescalation technique is to identify the verbal behavioral level the person is demonstrating and meet it with the appropriate behavior. Another key strategy is to remain calm and demonstrate this through your own body language, voice tone, and rate of speech.

Behavioral Level	Appropriate Interventions
1. Questioning	<p>Give a rational response to a rational, information seeking question.</p> <p>Redirect back to topic if questions become challenging, repetitive, or unreasonable.</p> <p>Don't get caught in a power struggle.</p> <p>Don't take it personally.</p>
2. Refusal	<p>Set limits. Focus on positive consequences if a positive choice is made.</p>
3. Verbal Release (yelling, screaming, swearing, etc.)	<p>Allow venting if possible.</p> <p>Remove audience.</p> <p>As individual begins to quiet, set limits. Be prepared to enforce limits if necessary.</p>
4. Intimidation (verbal or physical threats)	<p>Seek assistance.</p> <p>Wait for team if possible</p> <p>Avoid any form of physical intervention or touching the individual as it is likely to trigger physical acting out behavior.</p>
5. Tension Reduction (natural reduction of energy that occurs when a crisis is ending)	<p>Reestablish communication with the individual.</p> <p>Use empathetic listening. It may be a good time to discuss the incident and what went wrong or what to do differently next time.</p>

Adapted from training material developed by the Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI), 3315-K North 124th Street, Brookfield, WI 53005. Phone: (800)558-8976. The videotape "The Disruptive Adolescent" is also produced by CPI.